

News Release

Garden of the North Planning To Be Launched on May 4

By Dan Svedarsky on Wednesday, May 4, 2005

One of the hallmarks of the Crookston campus of the University of Minnesota has been the beautiful horticultural plantings, particularly the "UMC" spelled out in flowers by the front entrance. The Crookston campus is the home for the college as well as the Northwest Research and Outreach Center, the Regional Extension Center, Agricultural Utilization Research Institute, and the Valley Technology Park. "While the campus is already somewhat of a horticultural showcase, we plan to take the campus setting to the next level," according to Dan Svedarsky, Head of the Natural Resources Department and Research Biologist with the Northwest Research and Outreach Center. "We envision a landscape that is vibrant with flowers, shrubs, walkways, a water garden, legacy gardens which pay tribute to donors, a butterfly garden, displays of native flowers, a hummingbird garden, an array of agricultural crops, and other theme garden possibilities that we haven't even thought of yet."

The planning firm of LHB, Inc has been engaged to work with the campus and community and will hold 2 input sessions. After preliminary inventory work during the day on Wednesday, May 4th, Jason Aune, Landscape Architect, and Michael Fischer, Architect and Community Planner, will host a public programming meeting at 6:00 p.m. that evening at Youngquist Auditorium on the University campus. This session will "look for creative ideas and common ground for how the Garden of North can become a bridge to the community and region." After identifying possibilities and ideas, the planners will spend all day Thursday integrating suggestions into concept drawings to be presented Thursday evening at 7:00, also in Youngquist Auditorium. The community is cordially invited to both sessions to provide critically important suggestions and evaluations.

A model for Crookston is the highly successful display and research garden at the West Central Research and Outreach Center of the University of Minnesota located at Morris, also designed by Aune. In addition to regular summer visitors to their 4-acre gardens, they have a Horticultural Extravaganza in July that attracts over 1500 visitors! Svedarsky and his committee plan for the Crookston initiative to eventually top that of Morris as plantings and displays grow. The greater campus could become the most noteworthy horticultural display north of Morris so the local steering committee has dubbed the project, "Garden of the North." Crookston is probably the most northerly located land grant university facility in the lower 48 states and is thus uniquely suited to evaluate plant varieties in extreme climatic conditions.

The planning effort will take a broad look at the functional connections of the campus to the community which has never been done in a systematic way. "It is strategic for what we do on campus to be connected to the Crookston community as far as themes, trail systems, etc.," says Svedarsky, "so that's why we included a community connection piece." Aune has a wealth of experience in designing landscapes with ecology and sustainability themes. This will complement the Gateway Nature Center feasibility study underway in Crookston, discussions about a community center, and lay the groundwork for a UMC campus master plan. Two working concepts are, "Northgate," the notion of Crookston beginning at the campus, and "Southgate," a look at beautifying and interpreting the community at the south entrance from highway 2 and 75.

Support for the planning will come mainly from private donations from individuals, industry, and foundations for a total of some \$ 25,000.

Some developments and plantings will begin this summer on campus. "We have a former student who now owns a wholesale landscaping firm who can't wait to donate plant materials and installations," according to Svedarsky. "We also have a Prairie Room as part of the new Student Center and Ron Bowen, President of Prairie Restorations, Inc, has committed to provide native prairie plants just outside of that theme room." The Student Chapter of The Wildlife Society at UMC was recently awarded a grant of \$ 1,000 from the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society. The grant, written by Nate Emery, UMC's 2005 Man of the Year, is just the beginning, according to Emery. "I'm going to send grant applications to other organizations as well and I also have a pledge of prairie plant donations from a local firm." The Student Chapter has adopted a sheltered area on campus which they are calling,"Nature Nook." They have already installed a wildlife den tree and are excited to install more things such as a rain garden and other plantings this summer.

To ensure that developments don't get ahead of maintenance capacity, the local planning group is also launching the Legacy Garden Initiative in which donors establish a \$ 25,000 endowment (the lowest sum allowed by the U of MN Foundation) that would generate perpetual interest income to fund a UMC student intern(s) to provide summer assistance for the gardens. In addition, a legacy garden would be named in tribute to an individual(s) or company so chosen by the donors. Example of a theme garden might be a display of agricultural crops used for various food and fiber purposes presented in an interpretive fashion. Fewer people each year are aware of different crops and their uses. While several crops are evaluated in test plots at the Research and Outreach Center, they are inaccessible to the general public. A display of this type could be developed near Bergland Laboratory, named after former Secretary of Agriculture and U of M regent, Bob Bergland. Dr. Vera Krischik, entomologist at the St. Paul campus will be providing input to the design of the butterfly garden and Dr. Mary Meyer, of the Landscape Arboretum and Horticulture Department will be establishing a display of ornamental grasses.

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